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Women and Food Help

A look at how women are benefitting from... and contributing to food assistance efforts.

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Assistant Secretary Mary Jarratt Talks

About the Food Programs

The national inquiry into hunger in America has put the spotlight of national attention on the sophisticated network of federal programs that exist in this country to ensure that less fortunate people get the food help they need.

This network includes more than a dozen specialized programs, from food stamps to school lunch. In fiscal year 1983, the federal government spent more than \$19 billion to subsidize 95 million meals a day. The food programs are uniquely crafted to support farm programs and use agricultural surpluses at the same time they feed the needy.

Women benefit in many ways

Women are integrally involved in the network. In fact, women and children are the primary beneficiaries of the food programs. For example, in the Food Stamp Program, the largest of the federal food programs with an annual budget of about \$12 billion, 7 million of the 22 million people getting food stamps each month are adult women. Another 11 million are children.

The National School Lunch Program serves more than 23 million children each day, and the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) serves nearly 3 million mothers and children under age 5.

Women not only benefit from the food programs—they also contribute to them. Across the nation, women are involved in managing and working with the food programs at all levels. Women serve as national, state, and local food program directors. They are WIC nutritionists, food stamp caseworkers, school food service professionals, food bank coordinators, computer management specialists. . .the list goes on and on.

In the Food and Nutrition Service, the agency at USDA that administers the programs, about 1,300 employees—over half the work force—are women. Of these, more than 100 are managers or supervisors.

And, there is a woman at the top

in Washington, D.C., administering these diverse and complicated programs. That woman is Mary Jarratt, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services.

A demanding but rewarding job

Since May 1981 Jarratt has overseen USDA's food programs as well as the nutritional research and survey activities under the Human Nutrition Information Service and the Office of the Consumer Advisor.

She brought to the job a wealth of experience from 14 years on Capitol Hill, where she was the first woman to be named to the House Agriculture Committee's professional staff in its 130-year history.

While working for the committee, she developed an expertise in consumer nutrition issues and the Food Stamp Program, and helped staff the special House Committee on Welfare Reform in the 95th Congress. Before working for the committee, Jarratt had been a staffer for her Congressional representative from Virginia, the Honorable Richard H. Poff.

Her Congressional experience gave Jarratt a familiarity with the people and processes involved in reaching legislative goals. Perhaps most important, she says, it gave her a "sense of compassion for the programs."

"I think a lot of the programs are misunderstood," Jarratt says. "I've also developed persistence, because policy development is a complex and lengthy process."

Managers have a dual responsibility

Jarratt feels federal food program managers have a dual responsibility—to help those who need food assistance, and at the same time to see that the job is done as efficiently and effectively as possible.

"We have a federal responsibility for helping people who can't help themselves," she explains. "I think that all of our citizens sympathize with people who can't fend for themselves, but they still want to make

sure that the benefits they are generously funding are going to people who are legitimately entitled."

Jarratt cites the change of providing food stamp benefits as the kind of improvement she has worked for in the programs. Food stamp applicants now receive benefits from the date they apply at the welfare office rather than for the entire month. This accommodates the concern about responsible federal spending, yet does not deny needy people benefits to which they are entitled.

This dual responsibility has at times been frustrating for Jarratt. "I think we have had a dramatic impact on the way the programs are oriented, in that we are trying to serve more people at the lower income range, at 130 percent of the poverty line and below," she says.

"There's been a lot of misunderstanding that the Administration doesn't want to fund programs for low-income people, and that's not the case at all.

"We've submitted requests for supplemental appropriations early because we needed increased funding to feed more children free lunches, or because we were short of food stamp funds when unemployment was higher than had been predicted. At times Congress acted late on these supplemental requests, but the Administration hasn't been reluctant to fund the benefits."

Several special projects underway

Being an Assistant Secretary "is pretty hectic some days," Jarratt laughs. "Almost every week there's some kind of Congressional activity, either testimony or meetings with members of Congress. In addition, hardly a day goes by that I don't spend some time considering a regulation USDA is developing. With a lot of media interest now in our programs, I also have a lot of inquiries from the press."

Jarratt also works with national groups like the March of Dimes on special projects such as the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies campaign.

"This private sector initiative with the March of Dimes is a very important compliment to our food assistance programs," she says.

"There's no reason why low-income people should be in need of food with our array of assistance, but sometimes the more vulnerable don't avail themselves of help. For example, pregnant teenagers are more likely to have low-birthweight infants, but for a number of reasons don't seek help."

An important objective of the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies campaign is to encourage pregnant teenagers to seek prenatal care. "We're working with the March of Dimes to try to make teenagers more aware of the importance of early health care both for the mother and her developing baby," Jarratt says.

Jarratt has emphasized nutrition education as a means to help food stamp recipients stretch their food dollars. Last year USDA launched a series of workshops across the nation called "Making Food Dollars Count" to offer advice on food buying and preparation and to provide low-cost, nutritious recipes.

"We had regional workshops for state and local nutrition professionals who returned to their communities and repeated those same workshops for food stamp recipients and other low-income people," Jarratt explains. These activities are still going on in many communities.

USDA is following up this effort this year by distributing short informational materials with nutrition messages to local food stamp offices. These materials will be handed out or mailed to recipients.

Jarratt sees this as especially important. "It's hard to get a nutrition education message across in the Food Stamp Program," she says. "Eligibility is determined in the hurried environment of a welfare office, and a nutritionist is rarely, if ever, present. People take the benefits and make the best food choices they can."



Above: During a visit to food program sites in Miami, Assistant Secretary Jarratt meets with officers of the Latin Chamber of Commerce. Among the group's members are many merchants who participate as authorized grocers in WIC and the Food Stamp Program. Right: At a Miami WIC clinic, she holds a young WIC participant and talks with Dade County nutrition coordinator Denise West.

How the programs help ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"All the programs we administer have a role to play for women," Jarratt says. None is more important than the Food Stamp Program. More than 40 percent of the families headed by women live on incomes below the poverty line. These households comprise one-third of the nation's poor, and for them food stamps are crucial.

Three-fourths of the 8 million households participating in the Food Stamp Program are headed by women. They range from elderly women living on fixed incomes to working mothers. A special provision makes food stamps available to battered women with families living in shelters.

The program helps these and other low-income households purchase the varied foods they need for good health. Food stamps supplement a family's food budget—the less income an eligible family has, the more food stamps they qualify for.

Subsidized school lunches are available to virtually all public

school students in the U.S. and to many students in private schools as well. More than 89,000 schools offer the National School Lunch Program, and 23 million children take part every school day.

"Knowing her child is getting a nutritious, well-balanced meal at school means peace of mind for the working mother. This is increasingly important since twice as many women are working today as were two decades ago," Jarratt points out.

School lunches provide approximately one-third of a child's Recommended Dietary Allowance for key nutrients. They cost "paying" children less than a dollar on the average. And, for children whose families meet income eligibility guidelines—close to half of those who participate—lunches are served free or at a reduced price because of federal subsidy. Schools get both cash support and free commodities from USDA to help them cover the cost of producing the lunches.

About 3 million children take part

in the School Breakfast Program, which gives them a nutritious boost before the school day begins. Nearly 90 percent of school breakfasts are served free or at a reduced price.

The Child Care Food Program subsidizes meals served to nearly 1 million children in child care centers or day care homes, another help to the working parent. The Summer Food Service Program provides meals free to approximately 1.4 million children in low-income neighborhoods during the months when school is out. The Special Milk Program provides low-cost or free milk to about 1 million children in schools that do not have federally subsidized meal programs.

The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is of particular importance to mothers with young children living on low incomes. The program targets food aid to the special needs of pregnant women, mothers who have recently given birth, infants, and children up to age 5.

WIC is operated by local health clinics and other authorized health facilities. To qualify, mothers and children must be certified as "at nutritional risk" because of dietary need and inadequate income.

Participants get food supplements tailored especially for their needs, either packages of foods or vouchers that can be exchanged for specific items at authorized grocery stores. They also get nutrition education to emphasize the relationship between nutrition and health for themselves and their children. Since the program is handled through local health clinics, mothers and children are given early exposure to the health and medical community.

The newest program is the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program, which provides surplus foods such as cheese, butter, dry milk, and honey for use by needy households. These products are bought under price support legislation which helps to keep America's farm economy stable. They are distributed by community groups through local food banks. Millions of low-income people have found the products a useful supplement to their diets.



Education in nutrition, marketing, and food preparation gives recipients the knowledge and shopping skills they need to make their federal food assistance dollars go farther for themselves and their families. "Providing this message adequately to a constantly changing caseload is a difficult task, but one we need to keep working on," Jarratt stresses.

Visiting local sites a priority

Visiting program sites—school lunchrooms, WIC clinics, and welfare offices—is another important part of Jarratt's job. "I don't think you can effectively administer these programs unless you have an understanding of how the programs work at the local level. The strength of a good manager is to have had first hand experience with the programs.

"It gives you real insight, for example, to go out to a food stamp office and see what a recipient goes through to get that benefit. It makes you more aware of the complexity of the program, and of the need to simplify it," she says.

Jarratt, who loves children, especially enjoys visiting schools and WIC clinics. Knowing that her position influences the health and nutritional well-being of many children has made her job especially meaningful for her.

"While you don't see the children every day as Assistant Secretary, you have a lot of impact on them. For example, millions of children eat lunch at school every day, and for many, it's the most nourishing meal they get.

"And since we have the price support and surplus removal programs at USDA, I think it's very important that commodities be utilized in a constructive way. And what could be more constructive than feeding children?"

Goals for the future

Studies have shown that food programs help close the nutrition gap between the poor and families of higher income, and assure better nutrition for children during their formative years.

While the programs are working very well, Jarratt feels strongly that they need to be continually reassessed. "We need to focus the limited federal resources on those who need help the most," she says.

"Our budget reality is going to

force us to confront overlapping needs. We'll have to take a close look at programs that do the same kinds of things and evaluate which are the most important federal responsibility.

"The form of delivery is important," she adds, "but it isn't sacred. In fact, it probably needs to be changed from time to time. The commitment at the federal level, as well as at state and local levels, is the important thing.

"Here in Washington we tend to forget what contributions are being made at other levels, especially in the emergency feeding operations. Those programs represent a good blending of private and public money by administering officials. There's a role for both.

"I think the delivery of program benefits is always best handled with as much local decisionmaking as possible."

Will work for more improvement

USDA will continue to tighten management of the food programs. "I think we still need to improve our management, try to make better benefit determinations, reduce the error rates and so forth in order to secure the public's confidence in programs like food stamps," Jarratt says. "We've reduced the food stamp error rate 14 percent in 2 years, but we must do better."

She plans to continue emphasizing federal technical assistance and new technology as ways to help states and localities run better programs. Many state and local agencies have made huge strides recently by making needed management changes and computerizing food program operations.

While growing up in the small town of Floyd in southwestern Virginia, Jarratt never imagined she would become a government executive, "or that I would ever come to Washington, D.C., for that matter," she says. Her early aspiration was to become a doctor specializing in children's problems. But after coming to Washington to work for her Congressman, she was hooked on the legislative process.

Her job leaves her little time for the pastimes she enjoys—art, needlework, cooking, and horseback riding. But, she says, her job has given her "the sense of satisfaction that comes with accomplishing some of the things I wanted to do."

Her job has also brought her recognition from the President of the United States. In a speech given in the Rose Garden in September 1983 at an observance of the anniversary of Executive Women in Government, President Reagan singled her out from among the 105 women he has named to senior management positions, and among more than 1,400 women he has placed in top government jobs.

"How many other citizens are aware, for example, of the tough job Mary Jarratt is doing as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services? She has responsibility for programs totalling \$19 billion," President Reagan said.

The biggest satisfaction of the job for Jarratt is her personal knowledge that the federal food programs provide a great deal of assistance to needy people in this country, many of them women.

Under her leadership, the food programs are reaching more women and their families than ever before, and taxpayers can feel increasingly assured that their dollars are being spent to provide as much help as possible to those who need it.

article by Jane Mattern Vachon

The following articles illustrate in more detail the kinds of help women are getting through the food programs, and the kinds of contributions they are making as food program managers. The women featured live in different parts of the country and work in different capacities. While some have positions that offer more visibility and recognition than others, all play vital roles in getting food help to the people who need it.

Reaching Women and Children through WIC



Cynthia Neal



Pamela Hunter

Working in the community...

Two of the many people who play a key role in the operation of USDA's food programs are Cynthia Neal and Pamela Hunter, who work as food program specialists in the Food and Nutrition Service's Columbus, Ohio, field office. As food program specialists, they provide a vital link between the agency and people in the community.

Neal and Hunter, who have more than 4 years experience at the field office level, work in virtually all food program areas—from food stamps to food distribution. In a single day, they may authorize retailers for participation in the Food Stamp Program, investigate possible compliance problems, conduct quality control reviews to ensure that the state is operating within USDA guidelines, and perform warehouse

reviews to check inventories of USDA-donated foods and state records.

They agree that the diversity of their job creates special challenges, such as keeping abreast of changing program regulations and juggling their work to complete their various assignments.

But, the diversity and special challenges they encounter make their work even more appealing. "It's a lot more interesting than doing the same old thing every day," says Pam Hunter. "I like being able to get out and work with the various programs and people. I don't think I would enjoy just working at a desk. We actually see and meet with the people who are benefitting from the programs."

Women have played a major role in the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) since its beginning in 1974. In addition to serving women, the program also has a larger proportion of women in administrative and operational positions than any other FNS program.

The fact that the WIC program is one of the most successful food assistance programs today attests to the skill and dedication of its staff from the federal to the state and local levels.

Earlier this year, as WIC celebrated its tenth anniversary, outstanding WIC managers throughout the country were honored with awards for their contributions. One of them was Denise West, who won the WIC tenth anniversary award for program administration in Florida.

As nutrition coordinator for the Dade County Public Health Unit, West manages the largest WIC program in the state. Operating out of public health clinics and neighborhood health centers throughout the county, her program provides supplemental foods and nutrition education to an average of 12,500 women, infants, and children every month.

Staff has faced special challenges

Managing a large WIC program is a tough job anywhere, but West and her staff have faced some special challenges. In recent years, large groups of Cubans, Haitians, and other refugees have come to the Miami area. Currently, more than a fourth of the Dade County caseload—approximately 3,000 participants—are Haitian refugees, and about 2,500 are Hispanic.

"On any given day in our clinics," West says, "you can hear three different languages being spoken as

WIC staff interview clients—English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.”

Haitian Creole is a mixture of English, Spanish, and “broken French.” No accurate written form of the language exists because a large percentage of the population does not read or write.

Not surprisingly, says West, language was her staff's biggest barrier in serving the Haitian refugees until they were able to hire four direct service aides to work with this special group.

“One of our major problems was at the end of 1980 when we were switching to computerized checks (vouchers) for WIC foods,” she says. “It became harder to teach the Haitians what to buy because the new checks didn't have pictures of the food items on them like the old ones had. We had to teach them verbally and use sample food items.

“In addition, many Haitians couldn't read or add, so they had problems with situations like buying 36 ounces of cereal by combining different box sizes. Many could not sign their names, so the clerks taught them how to do this as well.

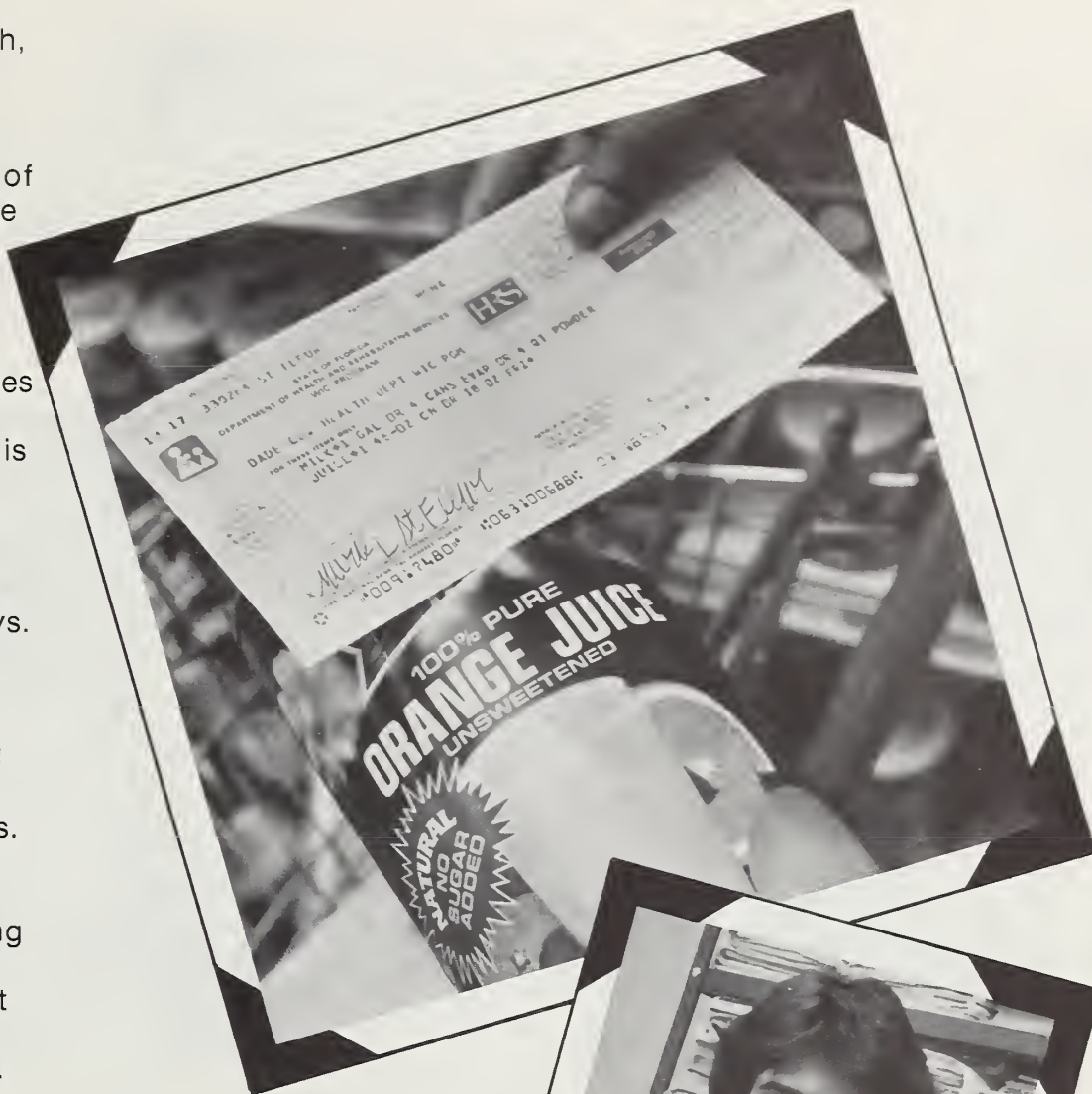
“Now many can sign their names on the checks. It takes them a while, but I really admire them because they work so hard to learn,” she says.

The WIC staff make a big effort to make their clients' visits pleasant and to give them as much information in as many ways as possible. Clinics are decorated with posters in all three languages on everything from prenatal care and child development to good shopping habits and use of WIC vouchers. Photographs of clients' babies are displayed in offices. The staff is proud of the clinics' healthy infants, the result of good prenatal care and nutrition counseling.

Clients make positive changes

The staff has noticed changes and trends lately which they feel are due to nutrition education. “Nutrition education is changing customs for the better,” says West. “For example, mothers are delaying giving their infants solid foods and whole milk. This has cut the amount of anemia seen in the younger clients.”

West and her staff have also noticed a slow but steady increase in breastfeeding among the women they serve. “We counsel all women

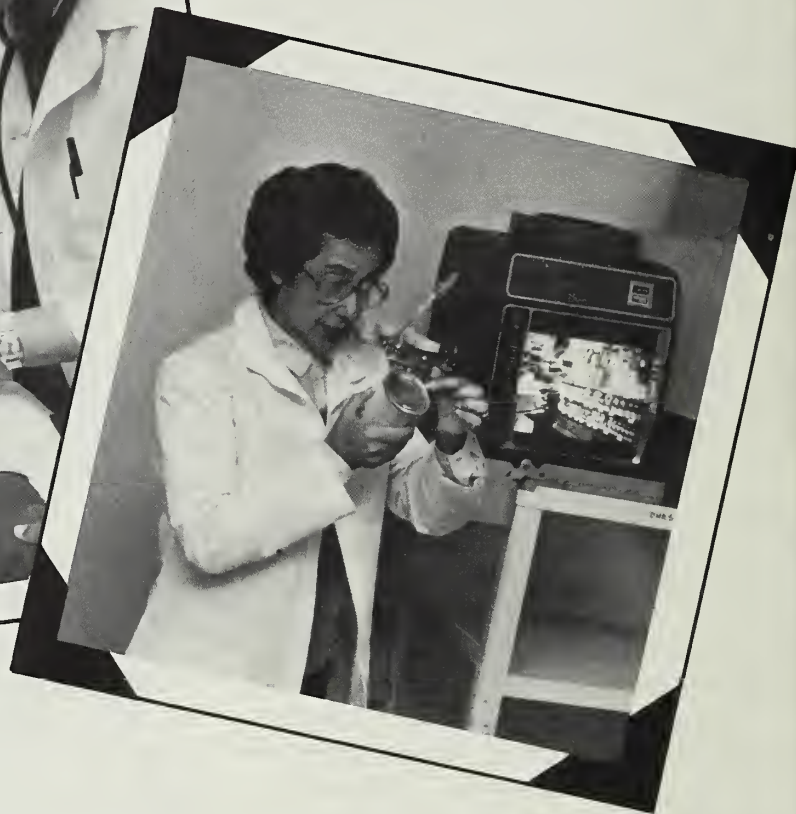


As nutrition coordinator for Dade County, Denise West (*right*) oversees the largest WIC program in Florida. At one of the county's clinics (*below*), a blood sample is taken from a baby as part of certification for WIC.





Left: A Dade County doctor examines a young WIC participant as his mother looks on. Right: Nutritionist Lenora Gomez-Rojas gives a nutrition education lesson to mothers in the waiting room of the downtown clinic.



on breastfeeding and ask the health care professionals with whom the clients come in contact to encourage it," she says. "We talk about the how-to's of breastfeeding, the problems, and how to communicate. Our teen maternity classes always have a session on breastfeeding."

One clinic had a birthday party for a mother who had breastfed her baby for a whole year. The staff invited all the interested mothers and had a movie on breastfeeding and a speaker from the LaLeche League.

"We try to use positive reinforcements," West says. "We talk to the hospital staff, and the nurse-educator asks her staff to spend more time with mothers who want to breastfeed."

Problems given close attention

Nutritionists on West's staff work closely with their clients and spend as much time as they can with each one. Lenora Gomez-Rojas, the nutritionist supervising and coordinating the downtown clinic, says this is crucial to the success of the program.

When babies on the program fail to thrive or are continually ill, Gomez-Rojas does some detective work. She works with the Extension Service staff, who sometimes conduct home visits, and she studies notes on clients' medical records to determine the cause of the problem. Often it is a matter of improper feeding.

She stresses to mothers that they should follow her instructions and watch the results. The proof of recovery is very convincing, she says. She and the rest of the WIC staff encourage clients to call if they have any questions or want help or advice. "I tell them, 'Call me any time.' And they do!

"We had one baby who was receiving special formula for milk intolerance but was constantly sick. We discovered that the mother didn't understand the baby was allergic to regular milk and was giving the baby milk in addition to the formula," says Gomez-Rojas.

"That's why, no matter how much time I spend talking to the mothers, I always want more. Only by communicating can we find out everything we need to know to give clients the

help they need."

She is glad clients pass nutrition information from the clinic on to their families and friends. The WIC staff also help clients make contact with community agencies such as churches, the food stamp office, emergency feeding programs, and EFNEP, USDA's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. EFNEP staff have given workshops in WIC clinics which were quite successful.

Gomez-Rojas considers her work with expectant mothers, especially with the first baby, the most important part of her job. "Of course we encourage breastfeeding for the first year, and we give clients information on breastfeeding at their initial appointment," she says.

She and the rest of the staff give counseling on diet, infant care, plans for working mothers, the need for medical appointments, and other valuable help.

Participants get prescribed foods

Each WIC participant in Dade County gets vouchers for specific food items. The particular WIC foods

Food and Nutrition

participants get depend on their nutritional needs. WIC foods include milk, eggs, cheese, cereal, iron-fortified formula, juice, and peanut butter or dried peas.

Prescribing the correct foods for each participant is an important part of a WIC agency's job. So is educating and monitoring authorized grocers to make sure they do not overcharge WIC customers or accept WIC vouchers for the wrong food items.

"WIC works because people are getting specific items," West says. "If vendors don't cooperate, then you're not meeting the needs of the clients or the interest of the program. Vendors need to understand the reason behind the selection of the foods."

WIC coordinator Marion Gaines, who Denise West calls her "right hand," has developed an active vendor monitoring system. Gaines worked 8 years for the state before coming to work for the WIC program. She trains the staff monthly on vendor monitoring.

There are 151 WIC-authorized vendors in Dade County, and the number is growing fast. Someone from the WIC staff visits each grocer at least four times a year, and Marion Gaines makes additional spot visits from time to time. She feels it is important for grocers to learn about WIC through direct contact with her and other staff members.

"Vendor problems are cut in half once the vendors get to know the nutritionist in their area," Gaines says. When they understand the reason for particular food choices, they can help the clients get the things they need as specified on the vouchers.

The WIC office has a file on each vendor in the Dade County area, which includes 19 municipalities. Gaines receives a computer "report card" for each vendor each month. She studies the number of vouchers received by the store, the dollar amount, and any problems noted.

If necessary, she asks an area nu-

tritionist to visit the vendor to ensure that he or she understands the program's operation. The nutritionist's report is sent to the vendor, the county WIC office, and the state WIC office in Tallahassee. The state can then send a warning letter to the vendor and, if appropriate, ask the vendor for a refund.

Many times the problem is a misunderstanding between the vendor and the WIC client. Gaines determines whether the problem resulted from vendor error, client error, or a mistake by the WIC office, and what corrective action should be taken.

According to West, good communication with vendors, with clients, and with local health professionals is essential.

"Keeping the lines of communication open is our biggest challenge," she says. "It's 40 miles between here and some of the clinics, and we're working with three different languages, different levels of administration, and more than 150 vendors."

But, says West, the effort pays off. "When people are kept informed on what's happening with the program, they can do a better job, they're more enthusiastic, and they can see the product of their work."

Working for lasting changes

Winning recognition for her outstanding work is not a new experience for West. She was selected Florida's Recognized Young Dietitian in 1979 and in 1981 was the Greater Miami Dietitian of the Year. She served one term as president of the Miami Dietetic Association, has participated in WIC and nutrition task forces at the state level, and is active in such groups as the American Dietetic Association and the Society for Nutrition Education.

West insists her highly competent staff is the reason for Dade County's successful WIC program. "Each clinic practically runs itself," she says. "A good, dedicated staff is essential, and we have a really good staff. Everyone has a critical role."

It's not surprising that mothers like coming to the Dade County WIC clinics. Nor is it surprising that WIC is making a difference in their lives.

"We hope for lasting changes in people—food changes for the better—and we're seeing that," says West. "The changes may be gradual, but education takes time."

*article by Catherine Rogers
photos by Larry Rana*



Lenora Gomez-Rojas and another staff member hold two of their favorite clients. The babies and their sister (not pictured) are triplets. At birth, they weighed 5 pounds or less, but are now thriving. In all, the Dade County WIC program serves an average of 12,500 women, infants, and children each month.

Women and Food Stamps

Of the multitude of social programs provided by federal, state, and local governments, the Food Stamp Program is perhaps the most accessible to the general populace. The program is available to everyone in need of assistance—men, women, and children alike—but because of social and economic factors, more women than men seek food stamp help.

The reasons women must apply for food stamps vary, including unemployment, illness, and the loss of a spouse. For elderly women, applying for food stamps often becomes a necessity when their fixed incomes don't cover their rising expenses. Vera Sides, a 78-year-old widow from Prattville, Alabama, knows what that's like.

Employed most of her adult life, Sides was forced to retire because of health problems. When she was younger, she worked in a factory in Montgomery. Then, for 12 years prior to her retirement, she helped care for children enrolled in nursery schools at two local churches.

Today she spends her days alone in a sunny apartment in Prattville's newly constructed subsidized housing for the elderly and disabled. A broken knee, which caused her retirement, makes standing and walking difficult for her.

"My children want me to break up housekeeping," Sides explains, "but I like to be independent." Her three daughters and one son respect her wishes, but they check on her daily and help her as they can.

Has benefitted from food help

Sides first applied for food stamps in January 1979. During much of the time she has participated in the program, she has received only the minimum \$10 allotment.

"Even that little bit helped," she says. "It bought my milk and bread."

Late last year, she had an eye operation to remove cataracts and shortly afterwards she suffered a stroke. Her medical expenses entitled her to take a medical deduction on her food stamp application, raising her allotment to its present level of \$72 just when she needed food stamps the most. Buying the

five kinds of medicine she must take daily continues to strain her budget, but she doesn't complain.

"I do the best I can. I don't waste anything," she says proudly.

Because of her health problems, Sides' doctor has advised her to do only light cooking. She prepares simple meals—toast and eggs, cereal or a sandwich. One daughter cooks her lunch every Sunday and cleans the apartment. Her other children take turns cooking hot meals for her several times a week.

They also shop for her or take her to the grocery store if she feels well enough to go. She buys food carefully, keeping cost and her dietary restrictions in mind. If she purchases any large portions of meat, she has them cut into individual servings and freezes them to use as needed.

Twice a week, women from the Autauga County Aging Program's Meals on Wheels deliver her hot lunches. She enjoys their visits as well as the meals, which consist of a meat, bread, two vegetables, milk, juice, and a dessert. In addition to the meal delivery service, the County Aging Program provides congregate dining for the elderly daily, but Vera Sides cannot take advantage of that program.

Ever cheerful, she counts her blessings—good children, a place of her own, and enough food to eat thanks to the Food Stamp Program and the Nutrition Program for the Elderly.

Many elderly women served

According to Deborah Cherry, food stamp supervisor for Autauga County, Alabama, persons over 60 years old comprise the second largest age group of participants in the county's Food Stamp Program, exceeded only by participants under 18 years of age. The majority of these elderly participants are women.

Unlike today's generation of women, many of whom work outside the home, most elderly women were housewives who stayed at home to raise their children. "Very few of the female elderly here have had a work history," Cherry says. "Consequently,

their only income is whatever they receive from their husbands' accounts."

Overall, 58 percent of the food stamp households in Autauga County are headed by women. When hard times come, the Food Stamp Program is the first place local women turn for help.

Explains Cherry, "There is no general assistance program in Alabama, so our office is usually a person's first contact with a social services agency. Many women whose husbands have left them suddenly through separation or divorce come in and are very panic stricken. They don't know what resources are available to them. We try to guide them to other local agencies that can also assist them."

In Wake County, North Carolina, Phyllis Sealey, food stamp branch coordinator, says her office also helps a lot of women, many of whom are their family's sole breadwinner.

"Women come in here with all



Women and Food Stamps

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"I do the best I can. I don't waste anything," she says proudly.

Because of her health problems, Sides' doctor has advised her to do only light cooking. She prepares simple meals—toast and eggs, cereal or a sandwich. One daughter cooks her lunch every Sunday and cleans the apartment. Her other children take turns cooking hot meals for her several times a week.

They also shop for her or take her to the grocery store if she feels well enough to go. She buys food carefully, keeping cost and her dietary restrictions in mind. If she purchases any large portions of meat, she has them cut into individual servings and freezes them to use as needed.

Twice a week, women from the Autauga County Aging Program's Meals on Wheels deliver her hot lunches. She enjoys their visits as well as the meals, which consist of a meat, bread, two vegetables, milk, juice, and a dessert. In addition to the meal delivery service, the County Aging Program provides congregate dining for the elderly daily, but Vera Sides cannot take advantage of that program.

Ever cheerful, she counts her blessings—good children, a place of her own, and enough food to eat thanks to the Food Stamp Program and the Nutrition Program for the Elderly.

Many elderly women served

According to Deborah Cherry, food stamp supervisor for Autauga County, Alabama, persons over 60 years old comprise the second largest age group of participants in the county's Food Stamp Program, exceeded only by participants under 18 years of age. The majority of these elderly participants are women.

Unlike today's generation of women, many of whom work outside the home, most elderly women were housewives who stayed at home to raise their children. "Very few of the female elderly here have had a work history," Cherry says. "Consequently,

their only income is whatever they receive from their husbands' accounts."

Overall, 58 percent of the food stamp households in Autauga County are headed by women. When hard times come, the Food Stamp Program is the first place local women turn for help.

Explains Cherry, "There is no general assistance program in Alabama, so our office is usually a person's first contact with a social services agency. Many women whose husbands have left them suddenly through separation or divorce come in and are very panic stricken. They don't know what resources are available to them. We try to guide them to other local agencies that can also assist them."

In Wake County, North Carolina, Phyllis Sealey, food stamp branch coordinator, says her office also helps a lot of women, many of whom are their family's sole breadwinner.

"Women come in here with all

Food and Nutrition

kinds of problems," she says. "In many instances, the father or husband is no longer in the home. The women find it very difficult to manage financially as well as emotionally."

In addition to providing food help, Sealey's staff refers them to other people who can offer guidance and assistance. "But, whatever the problem," Sealey adds, "the one thing our staff can always do is show concern."

Staff responds to need for help

Wake County presently has 34 food stamp caseworkers, 31 of whom are women. The majority of the area's food stamp applicants are also women. Four out of five food stamp households in Wake County are headed by women.

One of those women is Ora Hinton of Raleigh. The slender 34-year-old mother of four struggles to meet expenses. Like Vera Sides, she

has chronic health problems that prevent her from working, and she has the added dilemma of providing for children who also have multiple health problems.

Her two sons suffer from asthma and kidney and stomach ailments. Charles, who is 17, has had high blood pressure since he was 13 years old. He and his brother both need special diets.

The Hinton family presently receives \$177 a month in food stamps. Ora Hinton did not participate in the program when the children were younger, but she's grateful for the assistance at this particular time in their lives.

"Two teenage boys eat a lot," she says repeatedly. "My sons could eat all night!"

She tries to provide them with the fruit juices and bland foods their doctor has prescribed, but it's not always possible to buy everything she would like for them.

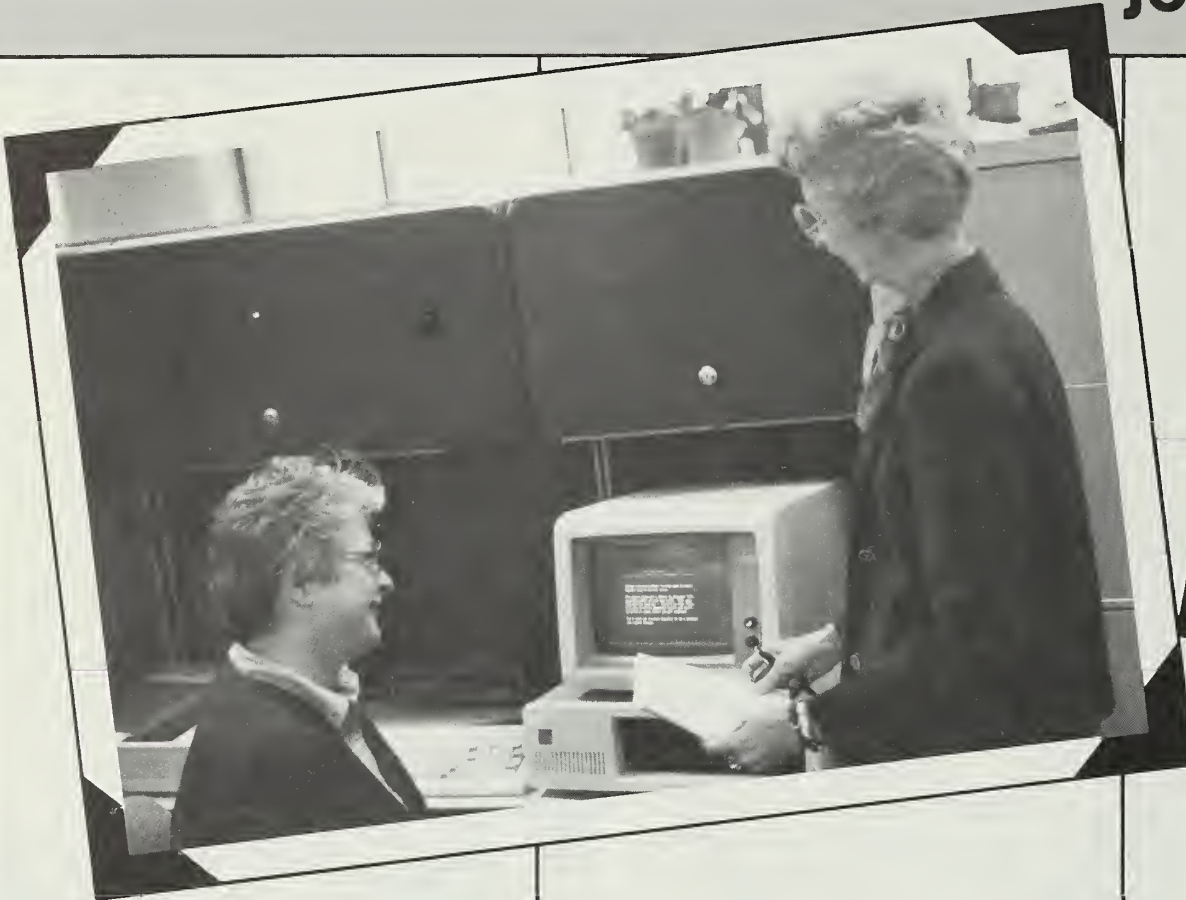
"To feed all of us I look for bar-

Vera Sides (below) is one of the millions of elderly women who have been helped by the Food Stamp Program. Here, in her home, she talks with Deborah Cherry, food stamp supervisor for Autauga County, Alabama. Phyllis Sealey (left) is food stamp branch coordinator in Wake County, North Carolina.



article and photos
by Brenda Schuler

Josephine Martin:



Josephine Martin has been a leader and innovator in school food service for more than 30 years. She has inspired and encouraged others to make school nutrition programs part of the education process that can, as she puts it, help children “eat for life.”

Presently, Martin is the director of the Local Systems Support Division of the Georgia Department of Education, which has responsibility for several child nutrition programs, including school lunch, school breakfast, and the Child Care Food Program.

Her division also has responsibility for the Nutrition Education and Training Program (NET), donated foods, and a number of nonfood school programs, such as school statistical information and the state textbook programs. Modestly, she credits the success of these programs to a strong staff of administrators, consultants, and co-workers who have helped her along the way.

Has seen programs grow and change

Martin began her school food service career in the early 1950's. She completed a dietetic internship at Duke University after graduation from the University of Georgia.

She had planned to enter hospital

dietetics when the Georgia Department of Education offered her a job working with the school lunch program. She found that she “really preferred working in the wellness rather than the sickness side of food service” and committed herself to helping children develop good food habits.

When Martin first came to work in the state, the National School Lunch Program was the only USDA school food program. It was the nation's first official recognition that the health and well-being of children was a matter of national concern. Since then, she has seen the program grow in every direction, and she has been involved in the development of companion programs such as the School Breakfast Program, the Child Care Food Program, NET, and the Special Milk Program.

Martin explains that the major difference in today's school lunch program from the 1950's is one of logistics rather than philosophy. “The philosophy behind the school lunch program was to establish an effective nutrition program for children. Our goal has remained the same—how we arrive at achieving it has changed.

“Because of limited funding in the early years, we could not reach as many low-income children or provide the variety of foods we do now.

Many schools had a couple of meatless menus a week and there was more cooking from scratch because fewer processed or pre-prepared items were available,” Martin says.

Today schools offer salad bars, different entrees, and a nutritious variety of foods at low cost due to improved management and effective procurement methods.

In the 1950's, most state departments of education conducted comprehensive training programs on a statewide basis. “Today the trend is to tailor training to meet individual needs. We are reaching more people with modern techniques, and food service professionals are learning to communicate better with students, parents, teachers, and co-workers,” Martin says.

Another big difference in today's food service programs is the availability of computers to perform many food service functions. But Martin does not feel there was less accountability with manual record-keeping. “Our procedures are a lot more sophisticated now,” she says, “but the Southeast Region of USDA always advocated complete accountability of funds and products.”

Was a leader from the start

After working for the state for 8 years in the 1950's, Martin went to

Leader in Child Nutrition

Columbia University Teachers' College and in 1959 received her masters degree in home economics education. She returned to the school nutrition programs, this time working for the federal government.

She credits Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) official Martin Garber for convincing her to stay in school nutrition. "He had such enthusiasm for the school nutrition programs and helped me see what *could* be done to solve hunger and social problems," she says.

Martin worked from 1959 to 1961 as a Southeast area home economist in the AMS Food Distribution Section, a division of USDA that would eventually become the Food and Nutrition Service. She worked with school nutrition programs in nine Southeastern states, assisting in administrative reviews, developing training programs, teaching workshops for school personnel and providing technical help to state agencies. She also conducted many workshops for private schools.

"The chance to work at USDA gave me a much broader insight into the federal role of nutrition and allowed me to observe programs in other states," Martin says. At the end of her first year, she had the highest travel record of anyone in the region.

In the mid 1960's, Martin saw the need for more permanent, direct appropriations and worked with other Southeastern state directors in support of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966.

This act established the School Breakfast Program, provided assistance for purchase of food equipment, and established state administrative expense reimbursement. It was later amended to include the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Nutrition Education and Training Program (NET).

Martin is a longtime member and supporter of the American School Food Service Association (ASFSA). She was ASFSA Southeast regional director in 1956-57 and program chairman of the 1957 national convention in St. Louis.

This assignment was a major responsibility for, as Martin puts it, "some young kid from the South."

She was ASFSA president for 1976-77 and, among many other achievements, helped implement nutrition education requirements in child nutrition legislation.

Martin has testified on the school nutrition programs at least 50 times before Congressional legislators in drafting or assessing child nutrition legislation. Even though she won't take credit for it, she played a major role in establishing federal funding for free and reduced-price lunches, which were initially supported by general food assistance funds and local appropriations.

Josephine Martin has also led efforts to pass constitutional amendments in Georgia so state and county funds could legally support school lunch activities. In 1982, legislation was enacted to use state funding to support a salary base for school lunch personnel and to establish performance standards. In 1985, state appropriations will exceed \$18 million for the school lunch program.

Feels school meals play vital role

Josephine Martin has seen a change in lifestyles over the last few years that make FNS programs more important than ever. "With more single-parent households and more women in the work force who have school-age children, school meals help insure that nutritional needs are met," she says.

Martin feels the success of the school food service programs is a team effort, with USDA, the ASFSA, state agencies, state boards of education, state and local school superintendents, and food service personnel all working toward common goals.

"In the 1970's," she says, "all of us were dealing with the issue of insuring all groups had access to food. But now, our main efforts should be directed toward marketing the delivery of food services to ensure that children and the general population have access to a wholesome diet."

How does she feel about recent studies that have shown the relationship between food intake and chronic disease?

"It's our challenge to take these

findings and translate them into effective marketing programs encouraging better food habits for our children. We need to show how we can use school food programs to prevent chronic illness," Martin says.

Schools can set good examples by using lowfat toppings for salad, sandwich and potato bars. They can tell parents about food served at school (for example, why fruit is a good dessert item) and communicate with PTA's and other parent-teacher groups.

She challenges managers to offer more choices so children will eat foods that still fit within nutrition goals and meal pattern requirements. Managers must develop effective relationships with students and involve them in menu planning, food preference panels, and decisions affecting purchasing practices.

"The future depends on...working together"

For the future, Josephine Martin would like to see school food service personnel move toward better vocational and academic preparation that includes professional standards. She envisions a major community effort to insure that school food programs are correctly shaping food habits. But most important, she wants to see the continued effort to make school food programs nutritionally sound.

"The future depends on the community working together to utilize the nutrition programs for the health and well-being of its citizens," she says. "If we are to maximize the potential of our citizens, the nutrition leaders need to work and plan together to see that the recipients of our programs have access both to the highest quality food and to education that will allow them to establish good food practices."

The National School Lunch Program has thrived under the leadership of people like Josephine Martin. She challenges us to look to the future to help our children have lifetimes of good nutrition.

*article and photos
by Kent Taylor*



Pam Bennett, director of Gleaner's Food Bank in Indianapolis, Indiana, is one of thousands of dedicated people working in the private sector to help get food assistance to the needy.

Her desire to help people and "make things happen" is what brought Bennett to apply for the job of executive director 3 years ago. "I love being able to make a difference," she says, "and food banks make a difference."

Food banks are not-for-profit clearinghouses that solicit edible but unsaleable food from corporate donors, distributors, processors, and wholesalers. They warehouse it briefly and redistribute it to charitable organizations that provide free food or meals to needy people.

"Food banking is helpful to everyone," Bennett says. Business people can donate products they have in surplus and get a tax deduction for them. Charities can feed more people. And low-income families can have a better variety of food available to them.

"We get donors' mistakes," says Bennett, "but those mistakes will stretch food stamps. They allow people to have a little bit of something in their cupboards to put with something they can afford to buy. We may have tomato sauce, and they can buy spaghetti, or we may have salad dressing, and they can

buy lettuce. And really, the salad dressing is more expensive than the lettuce."

Donors come from everywhere

Gleaner's is the central food bank in the Indiana Affiliate Food Bank Network. An important part of Bennett's job is soliciting donors. "Basically, what we do is go out and tell the food bank story," she explains. "We talk to corporate food manufacturers, growers, wholesalers, retailers—anybody who handles food—and explain to them what a food bank does.

"Our story has a lot of appeal because people don't want to pay to store a product that they can't sell—it costs them money. They also know they're going to help feed somebody who is hungry."

As Bennett tells her story, donations come in. "The first thing we got, interesting enough, was 2 tons of taco shells. We had called up a frozen food warehouse hoping to get meat, which is hard to come by sometimes, and the guy said, 'I've been storing these 2 tons of taco shells for 6 months. Would you like them?' We said, 'sure,' having no idea what we were going to do with them, of course."

In addition to food they receive on their own, Gleaner's also receives food from Second Harvest, the national food bank network. Gleaner's distributes the food to its more than 200 member agencies in a nine-county area in central Indiana, and to 10 affiliate food banks across the state. The affiliate banks redistribute the food to their member agencies.

"So actually," Bennett says, "we have a responsibility to the whole state of Indiana."

Any product Gleaner's gets in large quantity and can't use in their own area becomes Indiana network food. Similarly, its affiliates share food they cannot use.

"With everybody out there looking for food in their own neighborhoods, there's less food that goes to waste, there's more variety for the network, and there's more variety for member agencies to select from," Bennett says. Even with this variety, however, food banks cannot supply

everything member agencies need, but they certainly help.

Also receive USDA foods

Gleaner's was one of seven food banks across the country selected to participate in USDA's 2-year food bank demonstration project which ended in December 1983. The project was conducted to test the feasibility of providing USDA-donated food to food banks for use in their emergency food box programs.

As a participant in the USDA project, Gleaner's received surplus cheese, butter, instantized nonfat dry milk, and honey for distribution to needy households.

"The project was a good experience for the community and me," says Bennett. "It let us take a look at the way we were providing food to the poor and make some judgments about how it could be done better and in a more coordinated way.

"And it provided protein foods that poor people can't always buy because they're expensive. These are products you don't find in poor families' cupboards. We were very glad to get the quality and variety of commodities that we did through the project."

Since the end of the demonstration project, which will be evaluated this year, Gleaner's has been receiving USDA-donated cheese and butter from the State of Indiana through USDA's Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Other USDA commodities made available to states for distribution through TEFAP include nonfat dry milk, corn meal, flour, honey, and rice.

Growth has been dramatic

Gleaner's Food Bank opened and began distributing food to needy people in July 1980 from an old, drafty three-and-a-half car garage. As the operation expanded, Gleaner's soon outgrew the garage and moved into a warehouse that could accommodate the increasing supply of food being donated. It was not long, however, before that space also became inadequate.

Food Bank Director

Gleaner's was recently forced to relocate for a third time, and, according to Bennett, "through a miracle" found the perfect warehouse with room to expand even further. The warehouse was purchased through funds from a local community organization and money which the food bank received from the sale of the previous warehouse.

To help defray operating costs of the food bank, member agencies pay Gleaner's 12 cents a pound for the food provided to them. Other funds come from donations from private organizations and individuals. As Bennett explains, member agencies cannot always afford to pay the 12 cents a pound for the food and, instead, frequently donate volunteer labor or equipment to the food bank.

Making everything run smoothly is a challenge. "Food banks are labor intensive," says Bennett. "Because we're not for profit and because we have to operate with the 12-cents-a-pound charge, we have to operate on a very small margin. We can't

afford to automate and we have to work with a lot of volunteers who have lots of different skill levels.

"And," she continues, "you get equipment problems. Equipment breakdowns are planned for in a for-profit business, but for a not-for-profit organization, they can be catastrophic. Somebody usually wants to help—you just have to find out who they are and put them with the problem."

"An old hand" at food banking

Bennett left a job with private industry 12 years ago and has worked with community organizations ever since. Her first job with a community organization was as a part-time secretary.

"I wanted the job because there were a lot of people who were excited about trying to improve their neighborhood," she says. "And, I thought, I can do some good here because it was clear that I had some skills they did not have."

In a short time, Bennett was pro-

moted to director of that organization and expanded it from as she puts it, "a \$20,000-a-year, everybody's parttime neighborhood agency to a statewide \$3.75-million-a-year operation.

"But," she says, "a lot of the fun was gone because instead of dealing with ordinary people, I was busy writing grants and making pitches, and I didn't like that very much."

Bennett says she discovered she outgrew the director's job and decided to look for other employment but "did not want to leave the neighborhood." That prompted her to apply for the position of executive director of Gleaner's Food Bank.

"Food banking is one of the few areas where I could have been involved for 3 years and be an old hand," Bennett says. "Last year the Second Harvest Regional Group of Food Banks elected me to the Second Harvest national board so I have a kind of expert status, which is funny because I've only been food banking for 3 years. But it's young, it's growing, and it's exciting."

*article by Mary Beth Pasquale
photos by Larry Rana*

Two volunteers from a local community service organization look through boxes of food at the food bank's warehouse. The food will go to needy families in the Indianapolis area.



Harriet Moran:

As commodity food program director for the Inter-Tribal Council in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, Harriet Moran ensures that needy Indians receive USDA commodities through USDA's Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. But, as Moran will tell you, her job does not end once the food is distributed.

Since the Inter-Tribal Organization (ITO) began issuing food in April 1982, Moran has been working to educate program participants about good nutrition, food preparation, and new recipes using USDA commodities.

"Although a lot of these things are not required, I do them," Moran says. "It helps make the program a little bit better and helps the participants make better use of the commodities."

Through the Food Distribution Program, USDA donates a variety of foods to Indians living on or near

reservations, and to people who are not Indians but who live on reservations. Moran supervises food distribution on four reservations throughout Michigan.

"Basically my job as director is making sure that the commodity program is running smoothly at the tribal level and that there is an adequate supply of food on the reservations," Moran explains. "If there are difficulties, I have to find out what the problem is." She says she is fortunate to have good workers at the tribal level and problems are infrequent.

The distance between Moran's council office and the warehouse and reservations complicates her job as program director. The warehouses are 200 to 250 miles from Sault Ste. Marie, and the four reservations are scattered throughout the state. She likes getting out to

the program sites, however, and usually plans at least one trip per month, depending on the weather and the reservations' needs.

Helping families use commodities

Moran orders USDA commodities in bulk for the four reservations on the basis of the foods participants request. USDA offers a list of about 50 different foods from which she can order. They include canned meats, vegetables, fruits, and juices, dried beans, peanuts and peanut butter, egg mix, milk, cheese, pasta, flour and grains, corn syrup, and shortening.

"Participants like the program because of the variety of foods that

Part of Moran's job is making sure USDA-donated foods are properly stored and distributed. Here she goes over recent records with one of the warehouse managers on her way to a reservation.



Indian Program Manager

are available to them," Moran says. Each participating household receives approximately 70 pounds of food per person per month. Currently, an average of 800 people in 260 households participate on the four reservations.

To ensure that participants are getting foods their families will eat, Moran periodically conducts food preference surveys. She also holds food demonstrations to help participants become familiar with commodities they may not feel comfortable preparing.

The demonstrations, she feels, are a good way not only to introduce new foods, but also to encourage the men and women to be more creative in using the commodities and to prepare more nutritious meals for their families.

Moran recently held a food demonstration in which she prepared Spanish rice, biscuits, and fruit punch using commodities. While she was preparing the food, she talked with the group about the recipes and the nutritional value of the foods. "Nutrition is very important and we try to stress it during the food demonstrations," she says.

Cookbook is in the works

Moran is planning a cookbook focusing on the commodities, to provide more recipes for participants. "We plan to have recipes in the four basic food groups from the women in our tribal communities," she says. "I have already broken it down into the areas we want to cover and put up posters requesting recipes from the community."

Moran and the nutritionists with whom she works will review the recipes before they are included in the cookbook. "This is the big project of the year, but it will be fun," she says.

Moran says she is interested in nutrition information from a personal and professional standpoint. She is not a nutritionist but gets information from nutritionists and from printed materials. She enjoys reinforcing the importance of a good diet in her work with families participating in the commodity food program.



Moran shares a new recipe with the cook at a recreation center serving meals to the elderly. Later, she will show a group of people how to make the same meal for their families.

Seeing a need to provide nutrition information when the program began in April 1982, Moran gathered nutrition information printed by various governmental and private organizations for distribution to program participants during the monthly food pickups.

She now produces a pamphlet, *Commodity News*, which is available to participants. The pamphlet, published about six times a year, includes easy-to-prepare recipes, general nutrition information, and facts about the food distribution program.

A special interest in helping Indians

Being three-quarters Chippewa and having always lived near a reservation, Moran has a special interest in helping Indians. Before becoming director of the food distribution program, Moran worked with the elderly on the reservations.

"We assisted the elderly by providing food packages and information on keeping warm in the winter, and we connected them with programs that could assist them," she explains.

"I try to help the Indian people in other areas I know about," she says. She still makes sure that the elderly are kept aware of programs from which they can benefit, and recently took a course in volunteer income tax assistance to help the Indians in completing their tax forms.

As commodity program director, Moran uses her talents to help young and old alike. Managing a food assistance program is a challenge, she says, but the reward is knowing she's helping hundreds of families improve their diets. There's no question, it's worth the effort.

article by Mary Beth Pasquale
photos by Larry Rana

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John R. Block
Secretary of Agriculture

Mary C. Jarratt
Assistant Secretary

Robert E. Leard
Administrator
Food and Nutrition Service

Jan Kern, Editor
Jan Proctor, Art Director

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